

America's problems, not our own problems or our own challenges. But in some ways finishing last year's business this year is a fitting end to the 108th Congress.

REPUBLICAN RULES CHANGE

(Mr. PALLONE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, this morning, House Republicans are meeting here on Capitol Hill to vote on a change to their conference rules. A new rule would allow an indicted leader to continue in his position as leader if the indictment comes from a State grand jury.

Can my colleagues imagine that? If House Republicans make this rule change, they are condoning unethical behavior at the State level by their own leaders here in the House. The American people should be outraged by this arrogant behavior.

Back in 1993, Republicans made the change in their rules to demonstrate to the American people that they were not above the law, that if they ran this House, the American people would not have to worry about ethical problems, that Republicans would hold themselves to a higher standard.

Now, however, it appears that higher standard is gone. House Republicans are saying they are willing to stand behind one of their leaders after he is indicted by a State grand jury. It does not matter the charge. The Republicans simply do not care. But I am betting that the American people will care, Mr. Speaker.

TRIBUTE TO RAUL A. BESTEIRO, JR.

(Mr. HINOJOSA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the finest citizens of South Texas, Raul A. Besteiro, Jr., who passed away November 14, 2004. The Brownsville Herald called him a "Brownsville Pioneer" because of his groundbreaking efforts to transform the region.

For those of us committed to education and economic development, he was the ultimate role model. Mr. Besteiro dedicated his life to improving educational and economic opportunities for his hometown of Brownsville, Texas. He has left a lasting impact on the entire south Texas region.

Mr. Besteiro saw the potential of our region and committed his life's work to helping us achieve it. Whether he was preparing future scientists in the classroom, leading a school system to excellence, or promoting the economic development of our region through the Brownsville Port Authority, Raul Besteiro made south Texas a better and stronger place to live in. Let us carry out his legacy. He will be sorely missed, and we mourn his passing.

MORAL VALUE OF GOVERNMENT'S "BORROW AND SPEND" ECONOMIC POLICIES

(Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of talk and discussion in media and throughout the country about morals and the role they played in the elections. I personally welcome these discussions, but I am saddened by the fact that there has been little talk about the moral values of the government's "borrow and spend" economic policies.

This week, we will have a vote to raise the debt ceiling for the third time in the last 3 years. Why? Because Congress has been content to manage the American taxpayers' money in a way that immorally disregards the well-being of our Nation's economic future.

I believe it is immoral for this country to keep racking up debt as far as the eye can see only to pass it on to our children and our grandchildren. I think it is immoral to continue to borrow and spend and ask our soldiers to make the ultimate sacrifice while we refuse to make even marginal sacrifices in our fiscal policies.

Mr. Speaker, last week, on Thursday, November 11, the 278th Regimental Combat Unit left for Iraq. Many of these brave men and women of this National Guard unit come from my district in Tennessee. I was able to visit the 278th in Fort Shelby, Mississippi, the day they went off to defend our country. I wish them luck and offer my prayers for their safe return home.

□ 1015

Now I wish our soldiers' government would take the steps necessary to curb this deficit spending, to reinstate true budget enforcement measures like pay-go, and to pay down this national debt instead of continuing to raise the ceiling, so that when our troops return home, they are not left footing the bill for a war they so bravely fought. As we continue to discuss morality in America, I hope we will not continue to ignore the immoralities within our current fiscal policies.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS of Tennessee). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 15 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON) at 2 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote is objected to under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later in the day.

VETERANS BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2004

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 2486) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve and extend housing, education, and other benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 2486

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
Sec. 2. Reference to title 38, United States Code.

TITLE I—VETERANS EARN AND LEARN ACT

- Sec. 101. Short title.
Sec. 102. Modification of benefit entitlement charges for certain on-job training programs.
Sec. 103. Increase in benefit for individuals pursuing apprenticeship or on-job training.
Sec. 104. Authority for competency-based apprenticeship programs.
Sec. 105. Ten-year extension of delimiting period for survivors' and dependents' educational assistance for spouses of members who die on active duty.
Sec. 106. Availability of education benefits for payment for national admissions exams and national exams for credit at institutions of higher education.
Sec. 107. Requirement for coordination of data among the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor with respect to on-job training.
Sec. 108. Pilot program to provide on-job benefits to train Department of Veterans Affairs' claims adjudicators.
Sec. 109. Collection of payment for educational assistance under Montgomery GI Bill from members of the Selected Reserve called to active duty.
Sec. 110. Technical and conforming amendments.

TITLE II—EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Subtitle A—Employment and Reemployment Rights

- Sec. 201. Two-year period of continuation of employer-sponsored health care coverage.